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## THE DISCOVERY OF THE TEL EL-AMARNA TABLETS

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What may be termed the "inner history" of the discovery of the Tel el-Amarna tablets has never yet been written, and some of the published statements upon the subject are by no means correct. So I gladly accede to the suggestion of the editor of this *Journal* to say what I know about it.

Unfortunately the story begins with an illustration of personal ill-luck. For several winters I had gone up and down the Nile in a dahabia, and had always stopped on my way at Tel el-Amarna, where the fellahîn brought me all the *antikas* they had been finding there during the previous months. Owing to my mother's death, however, I did not go to Egypt the year that the tablets were found (1886-87), and there was consequently no foreign visitor to the Tel to inquire after antiquities, much less anyone who was acquainted with the cuneiform script. The tablets were all found in the ruins of a house, from which I subsequently obtained bricks stamped with the name of Akhenaten and stating that it was the Foreign Office of the government. Similarly stamped bricks were still to be seen on the spot when Professor Newberry was there a few years later.

Had I gone up the Nile that particular winter, the tablets, which had been discovered toward the end of the preceding October, would all have passed into my hands, intact and complete. As it was, they were sent across the Nile to Dêr em-Moez to a small dealer in antiquities, who packed them in bags and carried them on donkey-back to Suhag, where they were again shipped across the Nile and offered for sale to M. Frenay, the superintendent of the French flour mills at Ekhnîm, who also acted as agent of the Louvre. He knew enough about Assyrian antiquities to see that they were inscribed with cuneiform characters, and he rightly considered, therefore, that they were of value. Accordingly, he bought thirteen of them, telling the dealer (Elias) that he would send one of them as a specimen to Paris, and that as soon as he received a report upon it he would negotiate for the purchase of the whole collection. In Paris Professor Oppert,

misled by defective sight, hastily pronounced it to be a forgery. It was consequently returned to M. Frenay, who naturally took no further interest in the matter. The unfortunate tablets were again thrown into bags and carried, this time on camel-back, to Luxor, where certain dealers in antiquities, more especially Mohammed Mohassib, purchased them on speculation for a small sum of money. Meanwhile the thirteen tablets belonging to M. Frenay passed into the hands of M. Bouriant, the director of the French School in Egypt, who gave them to me to examine and copy when I arrived in Cairo toward the end of the year.

But the frequent journeys of the tablets and the carelessness with which they had been packed had wrought infinite damage to them. From the accounts which I subsequently elicited from the fellahîn of Tel el-Amarna I calculated that from one hundred and fifty to two hundred tablets were totally destroyed and fully as many broken and otherwise seriously damaged. That they should have been discovered, therefore, during the one season that I did not visit the Nile was a scientific misfortune of the first magnitude. As it was, most of the surviving tablets made their way to Luxor, where a certain number were bought for the Berlin Museum, while the rest, through the agency of Rev. Dr. Murch, were secured for the British Museum. Their value had meanwhile become known. The copies I made of the Bouriant tablets showed that they were genuine, though my supposition that they belonged to the age of Nebuchadrezzar turned out to be incorrect, and Emil Brugsch Bey (now Brugsch Pasha) telegraphed to M. Grébaut, the director of the Service of Antiquities, who was then at Luxor, to secure all that he could. M. Grébaut, very ill-advisedly, at once seized without compensation all the tablets which were not protected by consular authority—an action which caused the tombs at Tel el-Amarna and its neighborhood to be defaced and partially destroyed the following year. The tablets thus seized are now in the Cairo Museum. Some of those obtained by Berlin revealed the names of kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and so fixed the real age of the correspondence. A few tablets found their way into the hands of private individuals; some were bought by the Russian Egyptologist M. Golénischeff, others by M. Rustovitch, at that time the agent of Messrs. Thomas Cook & Son, while one or two were obtained by a Greek gentleman living at Roda.